

# Working to **END** Homelessness

## Working to End Homelessness Initiative: Best Practice Series

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### Working to End Homelessness Series

Thanks to the Butler Family Fund and the Working to End Homelessness national community of practice for their support, insights and other contributions.

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The [National Transitional Jobs Network](#) (NTJN) launched the *Working to End Homelessness Initiative* (WEH) in 2011, with support from the Butler Family Fund, to shine a spotlight on the important role of employment solutions in addressing homelessness and to identify and disseminate promising employment practices. To achieve these ends, the NTJN conducted a review of literature, met with key stakeholders and experts, and convened a national community of practice focused on employment programming for people experiencing homelessness.

The [national community of practice](#) includes 22 experienced workforce development professionals in 16 states that operate a diverse set of employment models including transitional jobs, supported employment, social enterprise, work readiness training, and alternative staffing and serve a diversity of populations experiencing homelessness. Throughout the course of a year professionals have identified best practices, lifted up employment solutions to serving the population, and highlighted policy and systems challenges to their work.

The *Working to End Homelessness: Best Practice Series* highlights lessons learned from these efforts and the research literature. This series is intended for employment and homeless service providers, program staff, and policymakers who want to learn more about helping individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness become successful in employment. Many of the concepts and practices in this series are connected through hyperlinks across briefs. These briefs are intended to serve as an introduction to the wide range of practices and strategies available; links are provided for further information and resources wherever applicable. The series includes briefs on:

- [Service Delivery Principles and Techniques](#): Helping people experiencing homelessness engage in services and succeed in employment
- [Populations Experiencing Homelessness](#): Diverse barriers to employment and how to address them
- [Employment Program Components](#): Considerations for designing programming for people experiencing homelessness
- [Employment Program Models for People Experiencing Homelessness](#): Different approaches to program structure

## Why highlight employment solutions to homelessness?

**Most people experiencing homelessness want to work.** Individuals experiencing homelessness consistently rank paid employment alongside healthcare and housing as a primary need.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately they often face diverse and overlapping barriers to stable paid employment, including economic, systemic barriers, human capital, and personal barriers to employment.<sup>2</sup>

**Linking individuals and families with stable earned income is a critical tool in the fight to prevent and end homelessness and can improve personal, financial, and family stability.** Numerous studies find that increased income is a strong predictor of a person exiting homelessness.<sup>3</sup> Also, income from work improves access to food, clothing, housing, and healthcare - increasing personal, family, and community wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Employment also shows promise in supporting recovery from mental illness and addiction,<sup>5</sup> in reducing recidivism for people leaving prison, and in reducing reliance on public support systems.<sup>7</sup>

**People experiencing homelessness have diverse needs and strengths.** Evaluation research shows that individuals experiencing homelessness can manage or surmount obstacles, find a job, and maintain it when offered access to a menu of options for individualized employment, housing, and supportive services.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness may have previous work experience, education or skills that can be leveraged and supported to help them enter and maintain employment.

**There is still much to learn in enhancing and advancing workforce services for diverse individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.** The NTJN's Working to End Homelessness Initiative: Best Practice Series helps meet this need by emphasizing the importance of meeting people where they are as individuals, tailoring services to common circumstances of homelessness such as single parenthood, and drawing on the practices and models that research and experience show best help end homelessness through employment.

## What's next? Developing employment solutions to homelessness

After reading this series of briefs, many agencies and decision-makers may wonder where to go from here. What are the next steps in planning and funding services? Reaching out to providers who have experience making programming decisions and implementing new models is a good step. Connecting with groups like the [National Transitional Jobs Network](#) and others who can provide technical assistance is another important route. In addition, the following tips may be of assistance.

**Planning Services:** A number of programmatic and administrative decisions should be considered in developing employment interventions for people experiencing homelessness including; recruitment, targeting and assessment, supportive services and referral systems, as well as the type and intensity of the intervention, retention services and ongoing support. We encourage program developers and decision-makers to access the National Transitional Jobs Network [technical assistance resources](#) and [key questions for program administrators](#) for support in developing program services. While there is no standard method for planning or

funding employment programs for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, homeless systems, workforce areas, employment programs and collaboratives should consider developing a menu of employment service options that meets the diverse needs, interests, and strengths of each individual. Experienced programs plan such services by:

- working with stakeholders in the local Continuum of Care (homeless service delivery system) to identify existing program and system competencies,
- assessing the need for new services,
- determining local participant needs, interests, and strengths, and
- designing program and system efforts with these considerations in mind.

We would also encourage that planning efforts actively reach out and engage consumers of employment services in the community. Doing so can help identify in-program and referral supports needed, intensity of program interventions and skill-enhancement programs desired and highlight other programmatic elements and systems integration efforts necessary to help individuals succeed in employment.

#### **Federal Funding Resources**

- [Workforce Investment Act \(WIA\)](#)
- [Workforce Innovation Fund \(WIF\)](#)
- [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#)
- [Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\)](#)
- [Community Services Block Grant \(CSBG\)](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Employment and Training Program \(SNAP E&T\)](#)
- [Transitional Housing Assistance Grants for Victims of Domestic Violence](#)
- [Education for Homeless Children and Youth](#)
- [Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth](#)
- [YouthBuild](#)
- [Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program](#)
- [Compensated Work Therapy Program \(CWT\)](#)
- [Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program \(HVRP\)](#)
- [Second Chance Act](#)
- [Incarcerated Veteran's Transition Program \(IVTP\)](#)
- [Medicaid](#)
- [Ticket to Work and Self Sufficiency](#)
- [Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS \(HOPWA\)](#)

**Funding services:** There is no singular funding stream for employment programs targeted to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and so most providers draw on a variety of sources to fund employment services and related supportive services. Providers often blend federal grants; state, local and private funds; or use revenue from a social enterprise or fee-for-service business model. Programs will most likely need to coordinate with their state or local government, Workforce Investment Board, Veterans Affairs office, or other agency to access new funding or to leverage existing funding. The program case studies found in the briefs include funding streams used to support the highlighted program intervention.

## Conclusion

Our intention is that these briefs support current and future implementation of employment services for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness; raise attention and investment in employment services; foster best practice and model research; and promote systems integration efforts to support the employment needs and aspirations of these populations.

## References

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The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of city, state, and federal policy makers; community workforce organizations; anti-poverty nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations committed to advancing and strengthening Transitional Jobs programs around the country so that people with barriers to employment can gain success in the workplace and improve their economic lives and the economic conditions of their communities. The NTJN supports a constituency of over 5,000 active members and stakeholders across the country.

The NTJN is a project of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights.

